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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The three major newspapers lead with Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon's threats against the 34 reserve officers who signed a petition against the evacuation of settlements. Israel Radio reported that Ya'alon demanded that the officers rescind their stand this morning, or else they would be ousted from the army. The station reported that, in consultation with their commander, they have drafted a new letter condemning the refusal to serve. The station cited a call by the Committee of Rabbis in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip for further soldiers and officers to refuse to serve. The radio reported that two West Bank settlers -- one from Yitzhar, the other one from Kfar Tapuah -- who bullied Rabbi Yehuda Wiesner, the IDF Central Command's Chaplain, threatening to kill him, have been arrested. Yediot (Shimon Shiffer) quoted PM Sharon as saying that the settler leaders are threatening the existence of the state, but that they will not win. Leading media quoted Justice Minister Tzipi Livni as saying Thursday, in a direct attack against extremists on the right, that legal authorities will take a forceful stance against those who challenge the sovereignty of the state and its legitimate organs. Maariv notes that hundreds of secular soldiers have signed the refusal petition, and that conversely, dozens of reservist officers residing in kibbutzim set up an emergency HQ on Thursday, in coordination with the Prime Minister's Office, that will enlist thousands of soldiers and officers who would agree to join missions of settlement evacuations, should the right-wing refusenik phenomenon reach proportions threatening to disrupt the evacuation.

Israel Radio quoted Mofaz as saying that Israel would agree to pull out from areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip even before the disengagement, should the Palestinians make thorough efforts to break the cycle of terror and disarm the terrorist organizations.

Regarding Sharon's promises to the USG on the cessation of building in the settlements and the evacuation of the unauthorized settler outposts, Ha'aretz (Aluf Benn) reported that National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice recently told an "Israeli personage": "We know that things are under control."

Leading media reported that Thursday the Likud, the Labor Party, and United Torah Judaism signed a coalition agreement, which will be presented to the Knesset on Sunday. Jerusalem Post reported that a first dispute immediately loomed between Likud and Labor over how many ministers and deputy ministers the Likud will have.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that former U.S. president Jimmy Carter arrived in the country last night as the head of the international team monitoring the PA election. The radio stated Carter's hope at the conclusion of a meeting with FM Silvan Shalom that this will be an "honest and fair, open, transparent election process." Carter added: "I hope ... that [the] demonstration of an ability to carry out their [the Palestinians'] civil responsibilities during this election will be a demonstration also that there can be trust for negotiations in the future between Israel and

the Palestinians." Shalom reassured Carter about the conditions of the election. Michel Rocard, head of the EU's election monitoring team, was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that the success of the elections is an Israeli interest, and that his team is satisfied about Israel's cooperation. Jerusalem Post stresses the Israel-PA collaboration in facilitating the election process. Leading media reported that Thursday the High Court of Justice ruled that some 8,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails will not be allowed to vote. Jerusalem Post reported that fearing a low turnout of Arab Jerusalemites in Sunday's election for PA chairman, PA and Fatah officials on Thursday stepped up their efforts to persuade residents to vote. Israel Radio reported that right-wing activists, including a National Religious Party member of the Jerusalem City Council, intend to disrupt the vote of East Jerusalem Arabs in the election. They cite a threat to the unity of Jerusalem. Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that hundreds of OneVoice Palestine volunteers, together with New York Jewish businessman Daniel Lubetsky, canvassed towns and refugee camps across the West Bank this week as part of a nonpartisan campaign meant to encourage high voter turnout ahead of the election.

Fayssal Hourani, a Palestinian author and peace activist, was quoted as saying Thursday in an interview with Ha'aretz that whoever is elected to head the PA on Sunday will bear heavy responsibilities but will have no real power to carry them out. Hourani believes that supporters of the frontrunner Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) have very limited expectations of him.

Ha'aretz reported that the Defense Ministry will soon appoint a civilian overseer for the evacuation of illegal settler outposts in the West Bank, in preparation for dismantling approximately 20 such outposts.

Jerusalem Post reported that unauthorized Egyptian passenger aircraft have been increasingly violating Israel's airspace near Eilat, prompting the IAF to station Hawk anti-aircraft missile batteries and fighter planes close by, ready to shoot down the Egyptian planes if they take a hostile turn. In several cases, fighter jets have actually been scrambled, then returned quietly to their base.

Ha'aretz reported that changes in the route of the West Bank security fence dictated by the High Court of Justice's ruling will cost 80-100 million shekels (about USD 18-23 million).

Last night, Channel 2-TV reported that former Israel Air Force commander Herzl Bodinger is mediating in the ongoing dispute between the U.S. Defense Department and the Israeli Defense Ministry.

Ha'aretz reported that several residents of the Gaza Strip settlement of Nissanit have decided to leave their home immediately, without waiting for an advance on their compensation, due to the recent upsurge in mortar shell and Qassam rocket attacks. Israel Radio reported on a spate of mortar shell attacks on Israeli targets this morning.

Jerusalem Post notes that the State Department's first annual Report on Global Anti-Semitism largely skips the Middle East and North America.

Jerusalem Post notes that after years of automatically censuring Israel, Canada may be shifting toward a more balanced stance.

Jerusalem Post cited the Egyptian weekly Al-Osboa as saying that the December 26 earthquake that shook the Indian Ocean "was possibly" caused by an Indian nuclear experiment in which "Israeli and American experts participated."

Maariv quoted Yishai Maimon, the Mayor of the Galilee city of Safed, Abbas's birthplace, as saying that he will not allow him to visit the city. Maimon recalled Abbas's role in the 1974 massacre of Maalot.

Jerusalem Post cited an announcement by Tel Aviv University Thursday that Zvi Stauber, the former ambassador to London and retired general, has been named the next head of the Jaffee Center of Strategic Studies (JCSS).

Yediot reported that Technion scientists have developed a pen-like device that can identify makeshift explosives used by terrorist groups. Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that North American Jewish organizations have launched a new campaign aimed

at convincing universities in the U.S. to change their policy on study in Israel. Those organizations claim that schools have been imposing unjust limitations on students who express an interest because of exaggerated fears for the students' personal safety.

A Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll conducted among Israeli Jews:

- "Do you believe the evacuation of settlements will lead to exchanges of fire between settlers and soldiers?" 75 percent: yes; 23 percent: no.

- "Will the settlers' protest influence the disengagement?" No: 45 percent; it will delay the disengagement: 42 percent; it will cancel the disengagement: 6 percent; it will accelerate the disengagement: 4 percent.

- "What is your most important thought regarding settlers actively opposing the evacuation of settlements?" They are dangerous people: 49 percent; they have good intentions, but have gone astray: 23 percent; they are idealists: 21 percent; they are a minority among settlers: 7 percent.

- "What is your principal feeling vis-a-vis the settlers, as you watch their clashes with IDF soldiers?" They harm democracy: 28 percent; their behavior is repulsive: 19 percent; I am concerned they will lead to a civil war: 18 percent; I identify with their struggle: 16 percent; I understand their situation: 9 percent; I want to join their ranks: 6 percent.

Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Only in banana republics can soldiers threaten an elected government."

Deputy Editor-In Chief Avi Bettelheim wrote in an editorial of popular, pluralist Maariv: "The time has come to clearly state the truth: this no longer is an ideological struggle -- this is a crude violation of the law, violent wrongdoing.... The settlers must ... reconsider."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "These are fateful times in which we cannot allow rebel forces to clash with or claim victory over a lawful, elected government. Sharon was right to hit the ceiling this week. Now is the time for him to take off his gloves." Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It is the job of the international monitoring team to ensure that Sunday's election is conducted in a fair, free and honest manner. After that, it is the job of the Palestinian people -- and their newly elected leader -- to build a society that will be equally so."

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in Jerusalem Post: "Ariel Sharon needs the world's help; Abu Mazen needs its discipline."

Block Quotes:

I. "Yes, Throw Them Out"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 7): "Thirty four settlers, all officers and NCOs in the reserves, signed the disobedience letter whose contents were published Thursday in Yediot Aharonot.... As civilians, they have the right, even the duty, to make their cry heard. As for their status as soldiers, there is no choice but to state that the Chief of Staff is right: those who do not retract their signature on the letter as of this morning, all have the same punishment -- being kicked out of the army. With all due respect to the dissenters' various arguments, right wing and left wing, at stake here is something a lot weightier than any political argument. There is no such thing as an army by request. In Sweden perhaps, if you push it, but not in the cruel surroundings in which Israel is located. Either you accept the national authority, or we close up shop.... Only in banana republics can soldiers threaten an elected government. You can support disengagement or oppose it, but there is no way to define it semantically as a patently illegal order. Those who decide that a soldier cannot carry out such an order are dissenters, even if they wear a yarmulke and are good little boys."

II. "We're Fed Up With You"

Deputy Editor-In Chief Avi Bettelheim wrote in an editorial of popular, pluralist Maariv (January 7): "Given the frightening rapid increase in verbal and physical violence by settlers opposing the disengagement, the time has come to clearly state the truth: this no longer is an ideological struggle -- this is a crude violation of the law, violent wrongdoing. This is it; enough; we're fed up with it.... No matter which cause it serves, fanaticism only causes destruction.... It is unconceivable that fanaticism for an idea has so blinded the core -- and perhaps not just the core -- of the settlers, that they are convinced it is permitted and good to pay any price, even a civil war, to thwart the disengagement decision.... The settlers must pause, and -- in the name of the God they are so determined to annex to themselves -- seize control of themselves, and reconsider."

III. "Time to Take Off His Gloves"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 7): "Worried messages used to arrive from Washington that Sharon didn't sound serious enough about implementing the disengagement plan. No matter how many times President Bush nagged him to dismantle illegal outposts, nothing happened. The more he went on promising and doing nothing, the more doubtful the Americans were that he could evacuate the settlements of Gaza in one fell swoop. The official explanation from Jerusalem cited tactical considerations: why waste energy clashing with settlers who are illegal and whose fate is sealed in any case? Better to save our strength for the big battle. This argument was interpreted by the settlers as a sign of political weakness.... The hesitant approach of the government, along with the voices of opposition in the Likud and the arrogance of the rebels, enabled the settlers to portray the disengagement initiative as illegitimate. Nothing could be further from the truth.... The establishment of a new [government] coalition doesn't mean the danger is over. Inciting soldiers to disobey on the grounds that the evacuation order is illegal is nothing short of a call to rebellion. Never since the period leading up to the 1967 war has the country been in such a state of emergency.... These are fateful times in which we cannot allow rebel forces to clash with or claim victory over a lawful, elected government. Sharon was right to hit the ceiling this week. Now is the time for him to take off his gloves."

IV. "A Vote For the Future"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (January 7): "While campaigning during the past two weeks, Abbas made several comments that have raised concerns in Israeli quarters. Some of his rhetoric was inflammatory -- such as calling Israel the 'Zionist enemy' -- and he staked out positions on such issues as the status of Jerusalem and the refugee 'right of return' that sounded no more moderate than those of his predecessor. It's unfortunate that Abbas chose the low road on the campaign trail, and so far has not prepared his people for the painful compromises that they, too, will have to make on the road to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The international hope, clearly, is that Abbas will, like other democratic leaders we know, run on one platform and govern from another. It is the job of the international monitoring team to ensure that Sunday's election is conducted in a fair, free and honest manner. After that, it is the job of the Palestinian people -- and their newly elected leader -- to build a society that will be equally so."

V. "Risking Peace"

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in Jerusalem Post (January 7): "Everyone knows that to promote Arab-Israeli peace in our new post-Arafat era, the world must help one embattled leader. Problem is, they've got the wrong one. Ariel Sharon needs the world's help; Abu Mazen needs its discipline.... The U.S. and Europe support disengagement.... [But] saying nice things about Sharon is not enough. Israelis should be shown that disengagement will shift the diplomatic landscape fundamentally in their favor. The international community can do this simply. First, it could state that the Palestinian claim of a 'right of return' to Israel conflicts with Israel's right to exist, with the road map, and with the two-state

solution, and is therefore unacceptable. Second, it could withhold funding from the Palestinian Authority, on which it is wholly dependent, until it has ended all violence against Israel. As a bonus, the U.S. could demand that Egypt shut down Palestinian smuggling operations from its territory, or risk harming its relations with the U.S. These are basic steps that should have been taken four years ago, and would have saved countless Israeli and Palestinian lives by ending the current terror war before it started. They are still the key to the beginnings of peace. Now that we are in window-of-opportunity mode, these steps have become imperative. Otherwise, disengagement will fall apart, as will the dream of Palestinian reform."

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